

COLLABORATING WITH HOMELESS SHELTERS TO SERVE SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

HOMELESS SHELTERS

Homeless shelters are designed to provide emergency housing to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. This may be a good option for trafficking survivors who are in urgent need of shelter. However, a homeless shelter may not be the right fit for every survivor. Determining if a homeless shelter is appropriate is ultimately the choice of the survivor.

While some homeless shelters are ‘overnight shelters’, requiring the individual to check-in each night and leave in the morning, many are not. There are homeless shelters that provide housing for extended periods of time. Each shelter can vary on what services they provide, the duration of those services, and what resources are available through case management. Make sure to connect to your local shelter(s) to learn more about their services and requirements.

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

As a best practice, anti-trafficking providers should involve the survivor in the decision making process by explaining what they can expect from the available shelter options. It is important that survivors have the information they need to make an informed decision about their housing.

Although homeless shelters may not be the ideal housing situation for survivors, they can be useful in emergency situations. Anti-trafficking organizations can partner with their local homeless shelters to provide cross-training on trauma-informed practices and serving survivors of trafficking. Shelters have expertise in the local housing system and can support survivors with access to housing resources, as the anti-trafficking program continues to provide the survivor with case management and supportive services.

HUD’S DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

There are four federally defined categories under which individuals and families may qualify as homeless. **Trafficking survivors are eligible for HUD-funded programs, including shelter, under Category 4.**

Category 4: Includes individuals that are fleeing or attempting to flee human trafficking, have no other residence, and lack the resources to obtain other permanent housing.

More information on the categories can be found at [HUD.gov](https://www.hud.gov). Use HUD’s [homeless assistance locator tool](#) to find a shelter near you. Note that not all homeless shelters are HUD-funded. Check with your local shelter(s) to learn about their eligibility requirements. Your local [Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#) can be a resource for finding shelters and other local housing resources.

MAKING THE REFERRAL

Anti-trafficking service providers may explore a potential referral with the survivor by assessing the needs of the survivor. Some potential questions to explore are:

Location

- Does the shelter location feel safe for the survivor?
- Is transportation accessible for the survivor to get to and from the shelter?

The Stay

- Is it an overnight shelter? If so, does the survivor have a safe place to stay during the day? What can the survivor do with their belongings if they cannot be left at the shelter during the day?
- Is the shelter faith or culturally-based? Determining the faith or cultural tradition and practices in the shelter will ensure survivors are comfortable and supported.
- Will survivors be required to participate in mandatory shelter activities or services? What are those requirements and are there exemptions?
- What are the sleeping arrangements? Some shelters may have shared bedrooms or beds in open areas, which may be a safety concern for survivors. Clearly describe the set-up of the shelter and sleeping accommodations to the survivor.
- Is there a guaranteed bed? Shelters often provide services on a first come, first served basis. However, some anti-trafficking programs have successfully partnered with shelters to prioritize beds for survivors. Discuss this option with your local homeless shelter(s).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are homeless shelters safe for survivors of human trafficking?

It depends. Some survivors feel safe in a homeless shelter and others may not. Homeless shelters are not in confidential locations and usually do not have extensive security. If there are imminent safety concerns for the survivor, a homeless shelter may not be the best fit.

How can anti-trafficking service providers address the safety concerns of a shelter?

It is common for providers outside of the field to express concerns about serving trafficking survivors. Usually these concerns stem from being unfamiliar with human trafficking or perceived safety concerns. Service providers should establish open communication with the shelter and address these concerns directly, including stereotypes or myths about human trafficking. It is important to acknowledge the expertise of each service provider with the common goal of serving individuals experiencing homelessness.

How can anti-trafficking service providers advocate for trauma-informed practices for survivors of trafficking within a homeless shelter?

By collaborating with shelters, anti-trafficking providers can create mutually beneficial relationships, where the shelter can focus on meeting housing needs and anti-trafficking programs can focus on providing case management and wrap-around services. Service providers can advocate for trauma-informed practices by providing training for shelter staff on human trafficking, and where appropriate, doing joint case consultations.